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EDITORIALS*

DANGEROUS DOLLARS—THE EVIL INFLUENCE OF EXORBITANT FEE CHARGERS

A Former Editorial on This Subject.—In an editorial printed in the January 1926 number of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE, the late William E. Musgrave, former editor, under the caption "\$ \$ Dangerous Dollars \$ \$," discussed some of the evil effects which result to the prestige of the entire non-sectarian medical profession, through exorbitant charges by a comparatively small number of members of the profession.

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An Experience With a Mid-West Charger.—When the other day the present editor received a copy of an itemized statement, for services rendered by a physician in a moderate sized city in a mid-west state, to an elderly patient to whom he had been called to give treatment for a fractured neck of the femur, the editorial above referred to was recalled.

The bill of the mid-west physician was sent to the Los Angeles representative of the estate of the patient, and because of the seeming size (the entire estate of the deceased patient amounting to about ten thousand dollars), this heir, through an

* Editorials on subjects of scientific and clinical interest, contributed by members of the California Medical Association, are printed in the Medicine Today column, which follows.

attorney, sent the statement to one of the officers of the Los Angeles County Medical Association with request for an opinion thereon. It has been stated to us that

"the attorney made the statement that the bill seemed excessive to him. He had made the proposition to the mid-west attending doctor that the bill be presented to any three men selected by the officer from the Los Angeles County Medical Association, but the mid-west doctor refused this mode of adjustment."

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Why This Specific Case Is Referred To.—This information is here given because in a discussion of professional charges it seems wiser to use as a basis for comment, concrete instances rather than generalized or abstract statements. There may be some who would hold that matters such as these should be taken up only in executive session. In theory such a plan may be good, but in practice it has been found to lead to nowhere.

It is generally admitted that exorbitant fee charging by some members of the medical and dental professions is a something that is nowadays met with, considerably more often than was the case one or two decades ago. The question really comes up as to whether or not one of the reasons for the existence of the present-day larger number of exorbitant fee chargers is not due to the fact that the subject is so nasty and so personal that most physicians desire to remain aloof from official action or contact therewith, even though in discussions with one another they roundly condemn the exorbitant fee chargers who besmirch the profession. When, however, it is realized that the small group of exorbitant fee chargers, more than almost any other factor, have in recent years destroyed much of the reputation formerly possessed by the medical profession for humanitarian and honorable dealing, it naturally follows that aloofness or non-discussion of deplorable exorbitant fee facts will only make matters worse, instead of better.

It is the viewpoint of many physicians that this small number of exorbitant fee chargers who are scattered through the profession have in recent years brought more disgrace to a noble guild than did the shysters or out and out quacks of days gone by, who in that time were supposed to be part of us.

These modern day exorbitant fee chargers conceal their basely commercialistic motives when they apply for membership in our medical organizations; and once in, are usually most unctuous in their personal relationships with colleagues. Thus they use their high pressure salesmanship methods, not only to mulct their patients of money out of proportion to services actually rendered (as based on service charges of fellow practitioners of equal capacity) but they seduce their fellow practitioners into thinking that their characters are far different and more honorable than is actually the case.

If their misdeeds in the way of extortion reacted only upon themselves, then the profession